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ABSTRACT

The interactions of individuality and community in a democratic republic have remained the great object of civic inquiries, the perplexing civic problem throughout the more than 200 years of U.S. constitutional history. This paper argues that this inquiry should be at the center of civic education today. Five recommendations for civic educators to meet this challenge include: (1) teach the analysis and appraisal of public issues about community and individuality and emphasize those issues that have been landmarks of public debate in U.S. history; (2) teach comparatively and internationally about public issues pertaining to community and individuality in different constitutional democracies of the world; (3) conduct the classroom and the school in a manner that exemplifies the conjoining of community and individuality in a democratic civic culture; (4) use service learning in the community outside the school to teach civic virtues and skills needed to conjoin community and individuality in civic life; and (5) teach civic knowledge, skills, and virtues that constitute a common core of learning by which to maintain the culture of a community and coterminously teach individuals to think critically for the purposes of freeing themselves from unworthy traditions and to seek improvement of the community. (Contains 14 references.) (DB)

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# COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUALITY IN CIVIC EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

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# Community and Individuality in Civic Education for Democracy

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October 7, 1996

From our founding era until the present, we Americans have discussed the relationships of the individual to the community in a constitutional democratic republic. During our revolutionary beginnings, we declared the primary object of government to be security for the "unalienable rights" of the individual. We also recognized that this security for individual rights depended upon an orderly and vibrant community, the creator and the consequence of government by consent of the governed. So, both community and individuality have been intertwined in American political thought. These connections, however, are inevitably paradoxical and problematical. They have raised challenging and controversial questions about the private rights of individuals and the public good of the community.

During the debates on the American Constitution in 1787, James Madison framed the fundamental public problem of community and individuality in a democratic republic. He noted the threat to individual rights from the tyranny of an unrestrained, community-based majority. In the *Federalist Paper* No. 10, Madison said (Rossiter 1961, 80),

> When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government. . .enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens. To secure the

> public good and private rights against the danger of such a faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government, is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed.

And so it has remained the great object of our civic inquiries, the perplexing civic problem, throughout more than 200 years of American constitutional history. How can the inevitable conflict between community and individuality — between the majority will and individual rights — be reconciled in a free country with a popular government? How can tension between the common good of the people and the private rights of each person be directed toward the positive development of our constitutional democracy and away from destructive conflict and dangers of despotism?

This inquiry about the interactions of individuality and community in a democratic republic should be at the center of civic education today. It has relevance not only for Americans but for any people anywhere in the world who seek ordered liberty, the situation in which the private rights of individuals are secured through the public good of the community. How should civic educators respond to Madison's challenge? I offer five recommendations.

**First Recommendation**

My *first recommendation* pertains to core content of civic education for democracy. *I recommend that we teach the analysis and appraisal of public issues about community and individuality — about the rights of individuals in tension with the public good — and emphasize those issues that have been landmarks of public debate in the country's history.*

During the debate on the Constitution of 1787, for example, Americans argued the merits

of two models of republican government that involved two different conceptions of how to combine individuality and community and thereby to secure both the rights of individuals and promote the public good (Sinopoli 1992). One side of this debate, argued by the Anti-Federalists (Storing 1981), favored the ancient theory of the small, homogeneous republic rooted in the classical literature of Greeks and Romans and revived in the 18th century by Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. The other side of this debate — argued by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and the Federalists — proposed a new theory of republican government in a large territory with great social diversity. The Federalist model contradicted the conventional wisdom that denied the viability of republican government in an extensive territory with a heterogeneous population (Rossiter, 1961).

The Anti-Federalists wanted "to secure the public good and private rights" through reliance upon community-based, participatory democracy to secure accountability of representatives in government. The citizens, interacting with their government, would be the guardians of their private rights and public good. By contrast, the Federalists, while recognizing the importance of citizen participation, believed, as Madison wrote in *Federalist Paper* No. 51 (Rossiter 1961, 322), "[E]xperience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions" that must be employed "to secure the public good and private rights." These "auxiliary precautions" referred to a constitutional design that involved separation and sharing of powers among different branches and levels of government in an extended republic, in which diverse groups and interests competed dynamically and lawfully for influence and power.

The Federalists won their debate with the Anti-Federalists and achieved ratification of their Constitution of 1787. But the public argument they conducted has continued from their time

until ours. The details have varied, but the terms have remained the same. These debates about how best to conjoin individuality and community — majority rule with individual rights — have been carried out through political campaigns to elect our representatives in government, through public policy debates among representatives in government, and through decisions of the Supreme Court (Patrick 1996a). These arguments should be essential elements of the curriculum of civic education. If so, our students will gain knowledge and insights from our history about how to deal with the inevitable tensions in a constitutional democracy between individualism and community — between majority will of the community and the rights of each individual in the community.

**Second Recommendation**

My *second recommendation* about how to address community and individuality in civic education is an extension of the first recommendation to the domain of comparative and international inquiry. *I recommend teaching and learning comparatively and internationally about public issues pertaining to community and individuality in different constitutional democracies of our world.* In our contemporary world of democratic revolutions, we have a grand opportunity to comparatively examine how different communities with various cultures confront universal problems of democratic governance.

Every constitutional democracy must respond to generic public issues pertaining to community and individuality, such as (1) how to have majority rule with protection of individual rights, (2) how to have social unity without sacrificing diversity, and (3) how to conjoin liberty and order. Different democracies of our world, however, have responded variously to these common, central, and continuing problems. Good civic education for democracy enables students

to comparatively analyze and evaluate how and why different democratic communities have variously responded to these common problems of democracy.

Through the comparative approach to civic education, we confront our students with alternatives; this expands the range of their knowledge to other cultures and deepens understanding of their own civic culture. And through comparative and international inquiries about issues of community and individuality, we break down the confining intellectual barriers of ethnocentrism and parochialism, which are serious handicaps to citizenship in our world of rapidly increasing connections among people and places (Hall 1996, 113).

Through comparative and international inquiry about principles and practices of democracy, we gain an appreciation of common human problems and various cultural responses, which enhances our capacities for enlightened citizenship. For example, my understanding of civil society and its relationship to the democratic state has been greatly increased through my exposure to democratic development in former communist countries of central and eastern Europe. I have achieved a greater understanding of the complex relationships of individuality and community in the United States of America by comparing the state and civil society in American democracy with their counterparts in democracies of central and eastern Europe and elsewhere. I have been motivated by these experiences to advocate comparative and international analyses of democratic principles and practices as a key to improved civic education (Patrick 1996b).

**Third Recommendation**

My *third recommendation* moves beyond the curriculum — the core content of civic education — to the climate or ethos of the classroom and the school. *I recommend that we conduct the classroom and the school in a manner that exemplifies the conjoining of community*

*and individuality in a democratic civic culture.*

The classroom, for example, should be an environment in which the rights of individuals are respected and authoritatively upheld. The classroom should also be a community of learners in which individual interests may sometimes be subordinated for the common good. The teacher should encourage and protect free and open expression of ideas in an atmosphere of academic freedom. Further, the teacher should apply rules fairly, according to established principles of equal protection and due process for each individual.

The classroom culture or ethos is correlated with development of civic virtues and behavior. If the ethos is consistent with the spirit of a democratic community and individual rights, then corresponding civic virtues and behavior are likely to be cultivated (Likona 1995, 145-146). Further, the culture or ethos of the school must be consistent with that of the classroom in order to maximize positive civic learning on behalf of individual rights and the common good.

Non-classroom attributes of schools — such as style of administration, school governance, and extra-curricular programs — have profound effects upon the civic virtues and behavior of students. There seems to be a positive relationship between a school-wide culture that emphasizes a democratic community and respect for individual rights and the development among students of desirable civic virtues and behaviors (Ehman 1980, 110-114 and Grant 1988). Thus, the classroom and the school as a whole can become laboratories in which students learn how to exercise responsible citizenship in support of individuality and community in a democracy.

**Fourth Recommendation**

My *fourth recommendation* moves beyond the classroom and school to the larger

community in which the school operates. *I recommend that we use service learning in the community outside the school to teach civic virtues and skills needed to conjoin community and individuality in civic life.*

Service learning connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility. The rationale for school-based service learning programs is that students will develop civic virtues, skills of civic participation, and civic knowledge in support of a democratic community and individual rights (MacNichol 1993). Service learning programs tend to fulfill the expectations of its proponents when they are connected systematically to the academic curriculum. For example, core concepts of civic education, which are taught and learned in the classroom, should be applied to service learning activities outside the classroom (Barber 1992, 254).

Service learning programs have great potential for renewing or enhancing the operation of civil society in a democratic republic. They provide opportunity for performance-based learning of responsible citizenship in a democratic community.

**Fifth Recommendation**

My *fifth and final recommendation* concerns a perennial paradox of civic education in a free society, which is simultaneously to emphasize conservation of a community's traditions and the possibility of liberation from them through constructive criticism. In recognition of this paradox, *I recommend that we teach civic knowledge, skills, and virtues that constitute a common core of learning by which to maintain the culture of a community; and that we coterminously teach individuals to think critically for the purposes of freeing themselves from unworthy traditions and seeking improvement of the community.*

A primary purpose of schooling generally, and of civic education particularly, is to socialize or enculturate — to transmit to each new generation the prevailing ideas, traditions, and beliefs. Communities that fail in this educational purpose are doomed. So social and civic reproduction through education is a requisite of community survival (Cremin 1977, 36 and Gutmann 1987, 14-15).

Long ago, following his investigation of 19th-century American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville recognized the connection of common ideas to community. He wrote (Bradley 1987, 8),

> . . . without ideas held in common there is no common action, and without common action there may still be men [individuality], but there is no social body [community]. In order that society should exist and . . . that a society should prosper, it is necessary that the minds of all the citizens should be rallied and held together by certain predominant ideas; and this cannot be the case unless each of them sometimes draws his opinions from the common source and consents to accept certain matters of belief already formed.

So civic education must be a builder and conserver of community through cultural transmission. But if it only conserves, individuals will become prisoners of their culture and unfit for a civic life of liberty in a democratic republic. So civic education simultaneously must be a means of enculturation and liberation, an instrument that enables individuals to conserve the best in their civic community and to improve the rest of it.

Civic education for individual rights in a democratic community simultaneously,

necessarily, and paradoxically enculturates and liberates learners. The question for teachers and learners should never be whether to emphasize one side of this paradox to the diminution or exclusion of the other side. Rather, the question should always be how to blend and balance the contending forces of community enculturation and individual liberation. Civic educators should use a more-or-less way of thinking and reject the either-or approach to this paradoxical question. Such is the way of civic education for democracy and liberty — for community and individuality.

**Conclusion**

I have presented five recommendations about how to conjoin community and individuality in civic education for democracy. In review, I will restate the five recommendations.

1. Teach the analysis and appraisal of public issues about community and individuality, and emphasize those issues that have been landmarks of public debate in the country's history.

2. Teach comparatively and internationally about public issues pertaining to community and individuality in different constitutional democracies of our world.

3. Conduct the classroom and the school in a manner that exemplifies the conjoining of community and individuality in a democratic civic culture.

4. Use service learning in the community outside the school to teach civic virtues and skills needed to conjoin community and individuality in civic life.

5. Teach civic knowledge, skills, and virtues that constitute a common core of learning by which to maintain the culture of the community; and coterminously teach individuals to think critically for the purposes of freeing themselves from unworthy traditions and seeking improvement of the community.

These five recommendations are an agenda for civic education that responds to James

Madison's long-ago challenge of directing our inquiries "to secure the public good and private rights" — that is, the well-being of the community and the rights of individuality — in a democratic republic. In our time, as in the late 18th-century world of Madison, we cannot afford to ignore his challenge. You may, or may not, agree with my recommendations. But, if you would be a responsible civic educator, you must take seriously Madison's invitation to inquiry about an enduring problem of democracy.

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